

THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN THE CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM: CATALYST FOR PROGRESS

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The Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP), established in 1983 through the signing of the *Chesapeake Bay Agreement*, is a unique voluntary partnership between Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, the tri-state legislative Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), representing the federal government. One of the nation's premier ecosystem restoration and management efforts, the Chesapeake Bay Program is focused on North America's largest estuary and its watershed.

The Chesapeake Bay Program relies on wide public support of its goals to carry out its multifaceted missions and employs various methods that go above and beyond environmental laws and regulations by working for voluntary compliance with strong commitments and measurable goals. The Program addresses the prevention and abatement of pollution, as well as the conservation and restoration of habitat, fish and wildlife; the enhancement of public access to the Bay and its tributaries; public education; and the overall health of the Bay.

The federal agencies play a major role as partners in the Bay Program. As the lead federal representative to the Program, the EPA Administrator represents all other federal agencies as a signatory to the Chesapeake Bay Agreement and serves on the Chesapeake Executive Council along with the other five signatories-- the governors of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, the mayor of the District of Columbia, and the chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission. The Executive Council meets annually to assess progress, set new goals and reaffirm continuing goals and commitments of the CBP. In the past, most of the goals and commitments of the Program have been carried out by the states and the District of Columbia on non-federal lands in the watershed. The EPA has provided the seed money to establish and continue the cooperative Program (the EPA budget dedicated for the Chesapeake Bay Program has been approximately \$20 million annually over the past several years). The EPA money is "matched" many times over by the state, local, private sectors, as well as other Federal agencies.

The Bay Program's Federal Agencies Committee (FAC) was established in 1984 and meets regularly to share information, provide advice to the Program, and to assist with the implementation of the goals and commitments of the Program. In 1993, in an effort to get Federal agencies more involved with the Bay Program, the FAC began two new initiatives meant to implement Bay Program commitments on the nearly 1.6 million acres (641,236 hectares) of federally-owned lands within the watershed.

In part motivated by the Clinton Administration's call for "Reinventing Government" and a desire for better interagency ecosystem management and planning, the FAC brought together 30 high-level federal officials representing 24 agencies and departments to discuss the federal role in the Bay Program and to sign *The Agreement of Federal Agencies on Ecosystem Management in the Chesapeake Bay*. The Chesapeake Bay Federal Summit Meeting took place on July 14, 1994, in Washington, D.C. The Summit and the *Agreement* formalized the increasing role of the federal agencies in the Bay Program, and set out for the first time a series of specific goals and commitments for the Federal government to achieve in the 64,000 square mile (165,760 square kilometers) watershed. The *Agreement* solidified the commitments of each agency to ecosystem management in the Chesapeake Bay region. It also provided a coordinated and cooperative framework for action with specific commitments for nutrient and toxic pollution reduction, habitat restoration, coordination of research and ecological management tools, and the use of national service opportunities for activities on federal lands.

The *Agreement* also set a precedent by establishing certain federal policies within the Chesapeake Bay watershed that apply nowhere else in the nation. For example, the federal government adopted a policy to favor "the creation of forested buffers along streams, in order to help achieve both nutrient reduction and habitat restoration goals of the Chesapeake Bay Program." This commitment was adopted and further strengthened by the Chesapeake Executive Council on October 10, 1996, with the adoption of a goal, "To increase the use of all riparian buffers and restore riparian forests on 2,010 miles [3,235 kilometers] of stream and shoreline in the watershed by 2,010, targeting efforts where they will be of greatest value to water quality and living resources." The federal agencies are now assessing all federal lands to determine how much of the mileage goal can be achieved on those lands.

Federal agencies are involved in the Bay Program because they either own land in the watershed; carry out natural resource management or environmental protection programs in the watershed; or provide technical assistance for research, monitoring or other pertinent activities. Each federal agency has a different role and mission, but they all provide varying degrees of program, financial, and technical assistance to the states, private individuals, and organizations throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Both within and outside of their roles in the Bay Program, Federal agencies conduct many activities that have long-term benefits to the Bay. As landholders, they are stewards with a significant role in preserving, restoring and managing habitat and natural areas, as well as managing developed areas (the world's largest naval base is located on Chesapeake Bay in Norfolk, VA). Federal lands include many miles of shoreline of the Bay and its tributaries as well as extensive park and forest lands, and other facilities throughout the entire watershed.

Federal agencies provide financial and technical assistance in many diverse areas. For example, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Consolidated Farm Service Agency provide the grants, loans and technical assistance by which farmers conserve soil and control polluting runoff. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages important and sensitive habitat, carries out restoration work, provides public access to wildlife areas and education opportunities. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration provides grants and technical assistance for researching and monitoring air and water pollutants, for monitoring and managing coastal development, and for monitoring, researching, restoring, and managing Bay fisheries and their habitats.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency helps to provide the overall funding and technical, computer and data management assistance for the Bay Program, and coordinates many Bay Program activities. It provides assistance to state and local governments in their efforts to improve sewage treatment plants and enforces the Clean Water Act and other federal laws and regulations. The Forest Service manages vast lands and provides assistance for urban and state forestry activities. The National Park Service manages natural and historic properties for conservation, education and interpretation and provides assistance in those areas to public and private groups. The U.S. Geological Survey collects and interprets data from the Bay's tributaries about nutrients, sediment, and toxics that impact water quality. This information is used by the Bay Program to set goals and measure progress. A total of fifteen Federal agencies are formal and active partners in the Bay Program.

Through these actions, and perhaps most important, through the coordination of these actions within the CBP, the Federal agencies are helping to restore the Bay and make the Chesapeake Bay Program a national model for ecosystem management.